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The Land Divided

By F. W. BEEDON, A. M.

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"The Land Divided"

Canals have been built in past centuries, but none is so remarkable as the great canal that links the Atlantic and the Pacific at the isthmus of Panama.

The desirability of such a canal was recognized centuries before, and an attempt was made by the French under the leadership of Ferdinand de Lesseps in 1882. By 1900 it was a failure with great waste and inefficiency. Then the rights of the French company were purchased by the United States, encouraged by President Theodore Roosevelt.

A revolution freed Panama from Colombia, and in 1904 the United States secured from the new nation the right to build the canal and to control the Canal Zone. The Isthmian Canal Commission then began to work, and while much important work was done, not much progress was seen for several years. The chief engineer was John F. Stevens, who resigned in 1907.

Then the work was turned over to the United States army and General George W. Goethals was made chairman

and chief engineer. Much of the credit for the success of the work must go to Goethals for his ability and determination.

But the diseases of the isthmus would probably have proved too much for the Americans had it not been for the labors of Dr. William C. Gorgas, an army medical man who was the sanitary officer. Gorgas had much experience in Cuba, and turned his efforts successfully to ridding Panama of the mosquitoes that caused malaria and yellow fever in the zone.

The civil administration of the zone ten miles wide along the canal was conducted by Joseph C. S. Blackburn, a Kentucky Senator. Jackson Smith, a South Carolina railroad man, was in charge of the laborers, their housing and welfare. The planning of the important locks was controlled by General

Harry F. Hodges, of Massachusetts, who was Goethals' assistant. Admiral Harry H. Rousseau, of New York, was made the head of the department of municipal engineering, motive power, machinery and building construction.

Goethals divided the work of building the canal into three parts, with an engineer in charge of each. The Atlantic division ran from the breakwater at Colon seven miles inland

to include the great dam at Gatun and the three Gatun locks on the Chagres river. General William L. Sibert commanded this division.

The Pacific division consisted of the last eleven miles of the canal from the high water level through the Pedro Miguel and Miraflores locks to the Pacific ocean at Panama City. Mr. Sydney B. Williamson was the engineer in charge.

The central division included the Gatun Lake created by the dam, and the very difficult cuts through the continental divide. Col. David DuBose Gaillard was in charge of this division, but he died in 1913 before the completion of his

task. The greatest operations were at Culebra Cut, now known as the Gaillard Cut.

This organization under General Goethals was successful, and the canal was completed and opened on August 15, 1914. The world war prevented the ceremonies that had been planned. Shortly afterward, the dangerous Cucaracha slide at Culebra closed the cut for several more months.

This 50-mile canal greatly reduces the mileage in journeys from east to west, especially from New York to the west coast of South America. It is open to the ships of all nations, but is definitely protected by the United States naval, air and marine forces.

The Panama Canal has proved to be a strong force for union of the interests of the Americas, and it stands as one of the most important engineering feats of the day. Its motto announces: "The land divided, the world united!"

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